

The Be – attitudes

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By Major Brian Coles

Haddon Robinson tell the story about when the editors of *Psychology Today* published a questionnaire designed to answer the questions:

- ◆ What is happiness?
- ◆ And how do we obtain it?

They invited their readers to respond, and a couple of months later the editors put together an article based on the results.

They discovered that pursuing happiness for many was like pursuing a black cat in a dark room at midnight when no one is even sure that the cat is there.

One man, for example, when asked about his happiness said, “I don’t know. I filled out the questionnaire. I think I’m happy; please verify.”

The article also pointed out that there were very few factors that directly correlated with happiness.

For example, whether one had much money or not did not have much to do with happiness.

People on the lower end of the economic scale often felt the pressure of not having money; of living through thirty-one day month on a twenty-one day check.

People on the higher end of the economic scale were not happy either. The more they have the more they have to worry about.

The editors received answers from all over North America, but geography had nothing to do with happiness.

Living in BC or Florida didn't make a difference when it came to being happy.

As well, the editors found no correlation between pleasure and happiness. Many people confuse pleasure and happiness.

People take narcotics, sniff cocaine, and put heroin in their veins for the high, the tremendous sense of pleasure. The kick is so great that people want to repeat it.

Other folks find pleasure by going to the bar or by downing a few cold beers in their easy chair. But people caught by drugs or alcohol are not happy.

Robbie Burns, the Scottish poet, compared pleasure to snow falling in a river. It is white for a moment, but then it melts forever.

The results of *Psychology Today's* survey show that while we may indulge in many pleasures and enjoy them, but enjoyment does not necessarily equal happiness.

A cartoon pictured a contented husband lecturing to his wife. He was seated on the couch with a whiteboard. He had written an equation on the whiteboard:

"The mortgage is paid; we're fully insured; the kids are O.K.; we're healthy; and we have each other. It all equals happiness.

The next frame shows his wife saying, "Walter, would you run through that just one more time?" The bottom line is not necessarily happiness.

Perhaps our struggle about what happiness is, is why Jesus grabs our attention in these beatitudes by repeating the word *blessed* eight times.

Some translations of the Bible use the word *happy* instead of *blessed*. This is okay if we are using it the way the Bible uses the word *happy*.

Our English word *happy* comes from French and from Middle English and has to do with something that is accidental, something that happens by chance.

We say that if perhaps something happens, we will be happy.

That's not the way the Greek word μακάριος, which is translated "blessed" or "happy" is used.

The Greeks called the island of Cyprus the "μακάριος" isle or the blest isle.

The idea was that those who lived on Cyprus never had to leave its shores in order to have all they needed to be content.

They had natural resources and minerals. They had a beautiful place to live with fruits and flowers.

The island was self-contained. No one had to search for the needs and wants of life.

Another meaning comes out of the Old Testament. God blessed man and woman.

When God blessed them, He was giving His approval. If they were blessed by God, they stood approved before Him.

When we are blessed by God, our happiness does not come from circumstances or by accident.

It comes because we stand approved before the Creator of the universe.

In some way or another, we all seek approval from someone, but we don't all seek God's favour.

If what matters most to us in life is the approval of our loved ones or the approval of our friends, then the Beatitudes are not going to do us any good.

The Beatitudes deal with how we can stand approved before God. They are the essential features and characteristics of a X'n. They are a description of what a X'n is to be like.

Each of these descriptions is produced by grace alone through the operation of the Holy Spirit in us.

In living out these characteristics we will know that God our Creator approves. Knowing that God our Creator approves we will experience true happiness.

So to be blessed means to sense the joy, or happiness, that comes from knowing that we stand approved before God.

That's why Jesus spoke about the blessed eight times over. He was speaking about the kind of happiness that comes out of God's approval.

The vital questions which we need to ask ourselves are these.

- ◆ Do I stand approved before God?
- ◆ Am I living out these characteristics of a citizen of God's kingdom in my daily living?
- ◆ Is it my ambition to do so?

It is only the person who lives out these characteristics by God's grace through the power of his Spirit that is truly happy.

If you feel you are not living life as described in these Beatitudes, God can change your heart and fill you with a newness of life,

a newness of desire so that you can begin to live out these kingdom characteristics in your life.

If you feel that you want to be the kind of person described in these Beatitudes; if this is your desire, your ambition,

then ask the Lord Jesus to rule your heart and to fill you afresh with his Spirit.

For through his Spirit working in you, you will begin to live out these kingdom characteristics in your life.